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# TECHNOLOGY

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## Appiphilia: Remixing with Romplr

6:34 AM, July 14, 2009

For all the hype about the "remix culture," I'm skeptical of the notion that the masses want to create their own music and video. Creating is hard, particularly when you're starting with a blank sheet of paper or an empty USB drive. Even when someone [provides you the building blocks](#), it takes more energy to put them together than most people are willing to expend.



Nevertheless, software developers keep trying to coax out the public's inner Prince. The latest example is [Romplr](#), which launches this morning as a \$5 iPhone application. Created by Moderati, the company behind the [virtual Zippo lighter](#), Romplr is song-remixing software that enables people to create new versions of tunes by rearranging their components. The initial version comes with three songs by hip-hop hit maker Soulja Boy Tell 'Em: "Crank That," "Hey You There" and "Turn My Swag On." In addition to bass, drums, vocals and other sonic elements from the originals that can be dropped in and out, Romplr provides seven additional samples that can be sprinkled into the mix. Think of them as [flair](#). See a demo [here](#). Naturally, you can [share your mix](#) with friends, including the ones you don't really know on Facebook.

(For those of you who aren't so taken with Soulja Boy, there's a second version of Romplr featuring three dance tracks created by the company's in-house stable of composers -- presumably the ones Romplr *doesn't* have to pay royalties.)

In the continuum of music-related apps that stretches from the purely passive to the labor intensive, Romplr falls right in the middle. It's more elaborate than [Bebot's](#) melodic robot cartoon or [Pianofly's](#) virtual keyboard, and it's not purely a game, unlike [Tap Tap Revolution](#). But it's less of a gateway music drug than [iDrum](#) or [Looptastic](#), which offer greater possibilities for truly original music-making. The main shortcoming is that you can't add anything of your own to Romplr's tracks, unlike [BeatMaker's](#) mobile sampler. That, to me, is what makes computer programs such as [Acid](#) and [GarageBand](#) so rewarding. And make no mistake, the iPhone is a computer capable of more than rudimentary recording: Just witness what locker indie rockers [the 88 did](#) with the iPhone [Four Track app](#).

A spokeswoman for Moderati said a future version of Romplr may give users the ability to add their own sounds or tracks. More definitive are the plans to offer more prerecorded song downloads and to produce versions of the app for other smartphones (wait -- there are other smartphones!?!).

The point for Romplr is to sell apps. For the artists who offer their tracks for remixing, though, there's a payoff beyond the song royalties that's less direct and more consequential. Giving people a chance to break songs down enables them to see more of the artistry involved in recorded music (although, in some cases, the artistry is coming from the producer, not the band). It also deepens the relationship between the artist and the fan by encouraging the latter to make an investment of time and effort into the artist's music. This is what remix culture is about -- letting the fans interact, not just listen.

-- Jon Healey

[Healey writes editorials for The Times' Opinion Manufacturing Division.](#)

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